of Secretary (Mines), Govt. of India with some State Secretaries of Mines and Geology, Secretary General, Federation of Indian Mineral Industries etc. has also been constituted to review *inter-alia,* the existing procedures pertaining to grant of mineral concessions and to suggest measures to reduce delays in this regard at different levels etc. The Govt. has also been interacting with the investors in the mining sector with a view to identify their difficulties and solve them through detailed interaction with the State Governments.

While geological data about mineral deposits investigated by Geological Survey of India (GSI) is available for sale at GSI sale counters, geological and topographical maps can be made available only after due approvals by the Central Government authorities depending upon the nature of such maps.

Private sector in coal and lignite mining

*128. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD:

Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to allow private sector in coal and lignite mining without any price and distribution control of Government; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for taking a decision to end Government's monopoly over the coal and lignite mining in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH): (a) The Government have, subject to legislative changes, decided to offer new coal blocks, without the restriction on coal mining for captive consumption only, to the Indian Companies on the basis of competitive bidding. The successful bidder will be free to sell coal in the open market and will be allowed to charge any price negotiated between him and the consumers.

(b) The basic objectives of the above mentioned decision of the Government are:-

(i) to cover the ever increasing gap between demand any supply of coal,

(ii) to augment investments in coal mining which are presently dependent on Government investiment alone; and

(iii) to improve overall efficiency of the industry through competition.

Representation to Review the Penal Provision of the ESIC ACT

*129 SHRI JAGIR SINGH DARD:
DR. SHRIKANT RAMCHANDRA JICHKAR:

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received representations to review the penal provision of the Employees State Insurance Corporation Act;

(b) if so, the response of Government; and

(c) by when such reforms will be actually made?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) to (c) Suggestions have been received from time to time for making penal provisions in the ESI Act, 1948 more stringent. Review of penal provisions and amendment of the Act is an on going process. Accordingly, comprehensive amendments were made in 1989 and penal provisions provided in sections 84,85 and 85-A were made more stringent. The existing penal provisions are considered adequate for tackling default under the ESI Act. However, these provisions will be further reviewed as and when considered necessary.

Princes of Sugar under PDS

*130 SHRI JALALUDIN ANSARI:
SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:

Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the issue price of sugar under PDS has been increased by Rs. 1.45 a Kg.;

(b) if so, the details and reasons thereof;

(c) whether Government intend to review its decision; and

(d) measures taken or being taken by Government to stabilise the prices of sugar?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. It became necessary to partially offset the increasing quantum of subsidy that had to be paid to bridge the difference between the purchase and issue price of levy sugar.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) The free-sale sugar prices are stabilised by judicious release of monthly sugar quotas.

Income Limit for People Living Below Poverty Line for PDS

*131. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Union Government have fixed Rs. 15,000/- per annum as the maximum income level for the people below the poverty line to be covered under the new Public Distribution Scheme (PDS);

(b) whether State Governments have been directed to prepare a list of the population living below the poverty line;

(c) if so, by when State Governments have been asked to prepare such a list; and

(d) whether it will finally take effect from June 1, 1997?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV): (a) to (d) A Statement on the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) has been made in the Rajya Sabha on 24.2.1997 and the detailed quidelines issued in this regard have also been laid on the Table of the House. As per the guidelines, the State Government/UT Administrations are required to identify the beneficiaries living Below the Poverty Line, based on the provisional estimates arrived at by the Planning Commission for the year 1993-94 adopting the methodology of "Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor" constituted by the Planning Commission under the Chairmanship of Late Prof. Lakdawala.

The State Governments/UT Administrations have accordingly been asked to identify the beneficiaries Below the Poverty Line, issue special ration cards to them and make all arrangements for delivery of foodgrains to the beneficiaries in a satisfactory and transparent manner. As soon as a State/UT completes this exercise, it can start deriving the benefits under the Targeted PDS. The Scheme of Targeted PDS will, however, become effective throughout the country from 1st June, 1997.

Privatisation of Bharat Leather Corporation Ltd.

*132. SHRI GHUFRAN AZAM: Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to privatise the Bharat Leather Corporation Limited, Agra, with immediate effect;

(b) whether Government do not consider the company as a unified platform for imparting training to artisans belonging to SC/ST and Minorities and the company has helped develop these sections of the society; and

(c) the facts and details of each year's results achieved during the past four years by the company on account of sales turnover, production package scheme/system, and cash losses?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Government has taken 'in principle' decision to convert it into a non-Government company through joint venture route or sale.

(b) BLC has been mainly engaged in trading activities and has not been conducting training programmes for artisans.

(c) The details of production (under the Package assistance Scheme and PSL Factory), total sales turnover, cash losses and net losses of the Corporation during the past four years are given below: